



Volunteer Recruitment

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INTRODUCTION

There is no organisation like the GAA. Nowhere in the world is there a national movement that has played such a positive role in the lives of its citizens or has given such meaning and purpose to small communities, larger towns and the whole nation. GAA Clubs with their wonderful facilities are the jewel in the crown of the association and are its most important asset. It is the incredible work carried out by thousands of volunteers, young and old, male and female, from every single walk of life which drives this remarkable organisation and keeps it fresh, relevant and critically important part of the lives of Irish people. Being involved in the GAA gives a sense of fulfilment which is unrivalled. It brings membership of the biggest Club in Ireland, puts one right at the heart of Irish culture and provides a pastime for every member of the family.

Our magnificent stadium at Croke Park gives us all a sense of pride that we have built the foundations, created the players who grace the sacred sod and when we go home, we will start the process again with the under eights on the following Sunday. People want to belong to the GAA. They want to feel a part of this remarkable movement. People outside the GAA look in at us with envy and wish they could join in. The challenge for us is to open the door to them. This recruitment toolkit sets out how we can recruit those who are waiting to be asked, suggest strategies to keep those who are already there and lists some approaches to attract those from outside the organisation who have gifts and skills to offer the GAA. All of the ideas within have been tried and found to succeed by Clubs who helped us to create it.

WHY PEOPLE DO AND DO NOT VOLUNTEER

WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

- Because I was asked!
- I grew up with GAA in my family
- I moved into a new area and wanted to get to know the community
- I enjoy it!
- It keeps me busy / occupied
- I make and keep friendships
- It helps my career
- I got involved via my children
- I wanted to “give something back” after my playing career had ended
- I want to be associated with something positive and successful
- I became unemployed for a while and felt my occupation had a lot to offer
- I retired early and had an interest in GAA and some “time on my hands”

WHY PEOPLE DO NOT VOLUNTEER

- I was not asked
- I do not have the skills required
- I'll be over-burdened with work – and will never “escape” from it
- I don't have the confidence, the time or the interest
- I don't know how to get involved
- Lack of interest / enthusiasm
- Clubs don't sell themselves / lack of marketing / communication
- I don't know about the GAA or the local Club – or worse they've a poor image of the Club

These lists contain many lessons for those who want to recruit volunteers into their Club. Most of us can see ourselves reflected in many of the reasons given and awareness and good management can ensure valuable volunteers are kept, affirmed and refreshed.

It is a fact that people do sometimes leave and we need to be aware of why they do so. Apart from the obvious reasons like burnout, personality clashes and frustration at the staleness of the Club, those who leave do so because they feel their involvement has ended organically send out a particular message to Club management committees. Later on, some ideas will be presented with a view to holding on to ex players and parents whose children have moved past the underage scene and now see no role for themselves within the Club.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER

POSITIVE IMAGE IN THE CLUB

Of critical importance is the image that your Club has in the community. The GAA as an organisation has a powerful image and is rightly seen as progressive, well organised and modern in its outlook. Therefore, people will want to be associated with a GAA Club that is positive in its outlook, is well managed and well respected in the local community.

The Club must be seen as:

- Open and welcoming – it should be a “place of doors, not a place of walls”
- An energetic place, full of enthusiastic people and full of activity.
- Making a major contribution to the community
- Well organised where people's time is productive
- Safe (especially for children) and well managed.
- Part of a huge, vibrant and successful organisation

CLUB PLANNING

Developing a Club plan is a good way promoting a positive image for the Club and will give people a sense of that the Club is going in the right direction. People like to see progress and a plan is a great way of demonstrating that.

The GAA Club Planning Programme allows Clubs to engage in developing a plan – for more information on this see the Club Planning section of the Club Support Manual.

APPROACHING NEW VOLUNTEERS AND PROVIDING A ROLE DESCRIPTION

The first thing to do when recruiting new volunteers is to ask them to get involved! It is advantageous that the person who is asking is known and respected by the potential volunteer.

Be specific about what they are being asked to do and the amount of time involved. Remember, one of the main reasons given for not volunteering is that people feel they do not have the time and the necessary skills. Therefore, it is best to match people to roles within the Club based on their own personal and work related skills. If the Club needs someone to update the Club website, ask someone with IT knowledge and explain to them the amount of time involved. Ensure that this is all they will be asked to do.

Once they're willing to help, best practice tells us to:

- Bring them along and formally introduce them to the Club.
- Let them know "whos- who and whats-what"
- Explain to them what it is you want them to do and make sure it's a clear, specific piece of work.
- Avoid at all costs, making them feel over loaded and don't throw anyone in the deep end – be clear about the commitment involved.
- Provide them with support – maybe get an existing volunteer to mentor them.

Sample Officer Role Profiles are available in the Club Resources section on the GAA Learning Portal.

THE UNITY OF VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT – THE "ONE HOUR COMMITMENT"

Each recruitment drive should begin with the most basic unit of voluntary commitment which is "one hour". This is the shortest time per week during which one person can make a difference. While it might appear to be a small amount, lots of one hour voluntary commitments can add up to a highly effective, focused group of volunteers who can take much of the hard work away from others in the Club.

Here is a list of examples of work that can be done in one hour per week:

- Sell lotto tickets
- Weekend underage coaching
- Clean the social Club
- Put out chairs for a Club function
- Wash jerseys for one team
- Put out flags / line the pitch before a match
- Keep water bottles filled for an underage team
- Update the Club website
- Assist with Club shop / Club merchandise

Each of these tasks are straightforward and easy to do, but when taken off the workload of a pressed volunteer, it can make a great difference to the running of a Club. More importantly it is the minimum commitment which is required to make a difference.

If the volunteer decided to double their commitment, once again the workload of the regular volunteers is reduced. All requests for volunteer help should begin on the understanding that the entry level of commitment will be one hour. This means that the volunteer is aware of their job and is in control of their duties.

CLUB EXERCISE

This is a good exercise for any Club officer to do. Picture yourself as a person / parent with no interest in the local Club or in the GAA. Your child tells you that they want to play Gaelic Games with the local Club.

How would you view the Club?

- Is it well managed?
- Does it have a good image / reputation in the locality?
- Is it welcoming?
- Is it active?
- Is it interesting?
- Is it positive in its outlook?
- Is it forward thinking?
- Is it fair to everyone?
- Is there positive and enjoyable involvement for children / youth players?

Having answered the above questions, would you allow your child to get involved in the Club and would you get involved as a volunteer? The answer to all these questions needs to be yes.

KEEPING NEW AND CURRENT VOLUNTEERS ON BOARD

KEEPING VOLUNTEERS ON BOARD

It's all-too-easy to take volunteers for granted. To keep everyone enthusiastic and refreshed we should check that we haven't overloaded anyone and keep providing feedback to them. It is important to give people variety and don't leave anyone in the same place / role for too long. Constantly acknowledge volunteers, formally and informally. Remember that a simple thank you is all that is required. The Club should also use its website and notes in the local newspapers to highlight the work that people are doing.

In general, people stay involved in Clubs because:

- They feel valued
- They feel their contribution is respected
- They feel part of the group and do not feel excluded from decision making
- They feel a sense of pride that they have contributed to the Club

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Many Clubs collect membership at the AGM and do not communicate with their members again until it is time to renew their membership. At some point, people are entitled to ask if they are getting value for money or if their membership means anything to them.

For this reason, it is critical that a relationship exists between the Club Executive and its members. Paying membership to the Club is the first sign that people want to be associated with the Club and this should be used to its fullest advantage.

If a Club is communicating with its members on a regular basis, then people are more in tune with what is happening and the concept of a "closed shop" does not exist. This will help in encouraging more volunteering and enhance the positive image of the Club.

It is now necessary for all Clubs to hold a database of all its members. This can be a toolkit in itself and serve as a highly effective way of communicating with all Members, Officers and Players. Anyone with a basic office skills will know how to mail-merge from the database from the database and send out a letter, newsletter or notice of the AGM or Registration Night. Consult the "Communications in the Club" section of the Club Support Manual for more information.

DEVELOPING A RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

1: LISTING THE TASKS AND IDENTIFYING THE PEOPLE

Club Committees know at all times that more help is needed, but sometimes, they find it difficult to assign a willing volunteer to a particular task within the Club. This is where a recruitment strategy can help.

Setting up a 'recruitment sub-committee', whose role is to oversee recruitment of new volunteers, is a good start. The first task of the sub-committee is to identify all the tasks within the club, to group them into sub-categories and then develop a method of approach which will be effective. Once this information is acquired, each area of club business is given to a team leader within the club who will then divide out the tasks according to the volunteer commitment which individuals can give.

2: SAMPLE LETTER TO CLUB MEMBERS

Once potential volunteers have been identified, they should be asked in person. However, a Club can also write to all its members and ask them to volunteer themselves for particular tasks on the activity sheet.

3: CLUB OPEN DAY – LÁ NA GCLUB

A Club open day is a great way to bring people from the community to the Club, particularly those who are new to the area. An open day full of activity will let people see that the Club is well organised and well managed.

It can also be of great way to encourage people to volunteer in the Club. Again, ask people to volunteer in specific areas in the Club and in an area that suits their particular skill-sets. Use the activity sheet as discussed to align people to tasks.

Many Clubs have been successful in attracting volunteers through Lá na GClub and it is something that a Club should look into making an annual event.

4: REGISTRATION NIGHT FOR UNDERAGE PLAYERS

The registration of underage players now occurs on a specified night in many clubs in late winter / early spring. These rights present a great opportunity for recruiting new volunteers, since they are attended by parents / guardians who might be new to the area and might be keen to "stay and play" with their children.

The challenge for the committee is to recognise this new talent and use it to its maximum. Once again, parents / guardians who arrive to register their children may suffer from the

illusion that they have nothing to offer because they have never played the game, so tasks have to be offered which are non games related, but still vital to the smooth running of a Club.

It would be ideal if a Club had a piece on their registration form which could enable them to enlist new recruits. After the registration night, the information gathered is placed on the database of members and you have a list of people and their skills. It is best to work on the basis of a small commitment at first which can grow if the person want to increase their involvement.

5: RETIRED / RETIRING PLAYERS

Each year, a number of players retire, or coaches whose children have moved through the Club, come to the end of their involvement. Without a focused effort to keep these people involved, they can drift away.

While it is appropriate to allow these people a space to get a rest from front line involvement within the Club, the committee needs to be on task if they are to maintain these people. Retired players in particular have a critical role to play in the underage structures since they have benefited already from modern coaching methods and will be role models for younger players.

One member of the Executive Committee could be earmarked to approach these people, get them a coaching qualification and bring them into the underage coaching team. Most ex players will usually return when their children become involved, but few Clubs can afford to lose such talent even for a few years and there is no guarantee that their children will be keen on playing the games.

TEN TOP TIPS FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

1. People are waiting to be asked – so ask them.
2. Women and older people are the most willing volunteers – involve them.
3. Think beyond the inner circle – end the clique.
4. Link tasks with available skills – use wisely.
5. Begin with an agreed volunteer commitment – one hour
6. Give affirmation – praise and reward.
7. Use your Club database to recruit and inform – communicate.
8. Use the Task Identification idea to give people a focused and time bound commitment – teamwork counts.
9. Have plans for recently retired players and coaches – play and stay with the GAA.

10. Avail of the GAA's own "President's Awards" scheme to recommend people to your county committee who have given dedicated service to your Club over a long period – recognition.

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

1: THE CLUB AGM

Clubs which do not operate a "five year rule", can enter a comfort zone of complacency with regard to the office bearers positions. This leads to an attitude where members do not think it is worth their while going to the AGM because all the same officers will be returned and no change will occur.

Members who might have ambitions for themselves or the Club are often reluctant to oppose sitting officers because of the fear of losing, upsetting their colleague or causing a fallout within the Club. Therefore the AGM becomes a stale affair with no change and all officers returned. The poor attendance can also be lamented by hard working officers who might like to see a new person in their position, but don't want to hand over to the wrong person. It is advisable therefore that a three or five year rule be implemented in Clubs which limits the number of years a senior officer can serve.

This created a more focused committee who know they have only a certain time to deliver their vision and can make way for other members who might want to graduate to a more senior position in the Club later on. It also avoids the "clique" mentality which keeps good people away or gives the impression of a closed shop.

The Club Constitution states that the Executive Committee shall be comprised of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, Registrar, Officer for Irish Language and Culture, Public Relations Officer, Children's Officer, one Players' Representative and at least five other Full Members (Rule 7.2 of the Club Constitution).

The following tips are useful in considering a recruitment drive through the AGM:

- Have a three or a five year rule to keep the Club fresh.
- When an officer has reached the end of their term, identify ways in which they can stay involved.
- Have robust structures which divide the work out clearly through dynamic sub-committees.
- Ensure the committee has an agreed plan to improve the Club through a development strategy.
- Give everyone present a chance to have their say.

2: USE OF SUB-COMMITTEES

Setting up small sub-committees can be an effective way to involve more people. Again, identify the committees needed and the people in the area with the necessary skills required. For example, the Club finance sub-committee could consist of five people, who help to manage fundraising in the Club and who keep the Club accounts. For more on this, consult the “Club Committee Structure” section of the Club Support Manual.

PROVISION OF TRAINING

COURSES AND RESOURCES

As already discussed, one of the reasons stated for not volunteering is that people feel they don't have the necessary skills for a particular role. Clubs Can help by asking a volunteer with experience in a particular area to “mentor” a new volunteer. This will give the new volunteer confidence in their role.

The GAA provides a number of specialised training programmes and other resources that are of great benefit in helping volunteers to understand and fulfil their role.

COACHING COURSES AND RESOURCES

The coach has a central role in the development of the GAA player and all Club coaches should have received coach education training.

There are a number of courses and resources available to coaches at www.learning.gaa.ie/coach.

CLUB ADMINISTRATION COURSES AND RESOURCES

The GAA provides Club Officer Training programmes throughout the year. These courses are designed to give officers an understanding of their role and to help officers to learn from one another through workshops / webinars etc. For further information on this, contact your County Development Officer or visit www.learning.gaa.ie/club_leadership.

The GAA Club Support Manual available at www.learning.gaa.ie/ClubSupportManual. This manual contains information on all aspects of Club Administration including officer roles, membership, insurance etc. This manual is a very powerful tool and can help new officers in particular to understand their role in the Club and other aspects of Club administration.